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-Libya leak imperils U.S. spies

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THE LEAK by unknown administration officials of Libyan strongman Muammar Khadafy's plot against neighboring Sudan risked the lives of American agents in the Middle East who had tipped off the CIA, infuriating President Reagan in the process.

With the President himself in command, top national security advisers agreed that the dispatch of U.S. AWACS radar planes to Egypt to monitor the dangerous situation could not be honestly explained without — endangering the U.S. agents. That is why, during his Feb. 16 press conference, Reagan himself seemed completely in the dark and passed off the shift of the AWACS as "not an unusual happening."

When the real story was leaked (probably by Pentagon officials), the President's first worry was that Khadafy would retaliate by finding the real

Inside report

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or pseudo U.S. agents and order them killed. Reagan also knew that the press would ridicule him for the apparent ignorance he displayed at his press conference.

THE POPE PLOT

A TOP-secret State Dept. message to the Italian government tries to make amends for seeming past U.S. skepticism by professing what one official termed "great interest by the Reagan administration" in the continuing probe of possible Soviet complicity in the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II.

The diplomatic note was intended to dispel well-founded criticism that the CIA was not interested in pushing the investigation of a Soviet hand, through its subservient Communist neighbor Bulgaria, in the assassination attempt. One reason for the CIA's apparent lack of interest is that its agents in Europe were certain — and so reported to Washington — that the assassin was operating as an individual, not as part of a con-

spiracy.

That erroneous view has now been transformed at the top of the CIA, which has been giving discreet help to Italian police and intelligence authorities in their investigation. The message to Italy's government was a between-the-lines cheer for the findings thus far and a hope of more to come.